Ralph Waldo Emerson Timeline



May 25, 1803

Ralph Waldo Emerson Born

Ralph Waldo Emerson is born in Boston to Rev. William and Ruth Haskins Emerson. He is the second of their eight children, five of whom reach adulthood.

May 12, 1811

Father Dies

Less than three months after the birth of his eighth child, Rev. William Emerson dies of stomach cancer.

1812

Begins School

Emerson enters Boston Latin School.

Oct 1817

Enters Harvard

After graduating from Boston Latin, Emerson begins undergraduate studies at Harvard College. He teaches grammar school part-time to earn money.

Aug 29, 1821

Graduates

Emerson graduates from Harvard and takes a job teaching at a girls' school run by his brother William.

Nov 1822

First Publication

Emerson publishes his first piece of writing, an article entitled "Thoughts on the Religion of the Middle Ages" in *Christian Disciple and Theological Review* magazine.

Feb 1825

Divinity School

Emerson studies at Harvard's new School of Divinity.

Nov 25, 1826

Goes South

Emerson leaves his teaching job and sails south for the winter to Charleston, South Carolina and St. Augustine, Florida in order to restore his failing health. He returns to Boston in June.

Dec 17, 1828

Becomes Engaged

Emerson becomes engaged to Ellen Louisa Tucker, whom he met the previous year.

Jan 29, 1829

Becomes Pastor

Emerson joins Second Church, Boston as a colleague pastor. He is ordained and soon promoted to pastor of the church.

Sep 30, 1829

Marriage

Emerson marries Ellen Tucker.

Feb 8, 1831

Wife Dies

After less than 18 months of marriage, Emerson's wife Ellen dies of tuberculosis at the age of twenty.

Dec 1832

Travels to Europe

Emerson resigns from his pastor position at Second Church and sails for Europe. During his ten-month trip, he meets William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Scottish writer Thomas Carlyle. Emerson begins sketching out his philosophies on nature and self-reliance.

Nov 15, 1833

First Lecture

Emerson gives his first public lecture, a talk entitled "The Uses of Natural History," in Boston, launching a lecture career that lasts nearly 50 years.

Dec 9, 1834

The Sage Arrives in Concord

A week after the death of his brother Edward from tuberculosis, Emerson moves to the town of Concord, Massachusetts, where he keeps a home for the rest of his life. His presence in the hub of transcendentalism earns him the nickname "the sage of Concord."

Jan 29, 1835

Starts Lecture Series

Emerson starts his first lecture series, "Biography," in Boston.

Sep 14, 1835

Marries Again

Emerson marries his second wife, Lydia Jackson.

Sep 9, 1836

*Nature* Published

Emerson publishes the essay *Nature*, which outlines his ideas about the manifestation of the universal in nature. A week later, he presides at the first meeting of the Transcendental Club, a meeting of New England intellectuals that includes Henry David Thoreau, Bronson Alcott and Margaret Fuller. Emerson's *Nature* is one of their founding documents.

Oct 30, 1836

Son Born

Ralph Waldo and Lydia Emerson's first son Waldo is born.

Aug 31, 1837

"The American Scholar"

Emerson gives his lecture "The American Scholar" to a crowded house at Harvard. In the audience is an undergraduate student named Henry David Thoreau, who is profoundly moved by the talk.

Feb 24, 1839

Daughter Born

The couple's second child is born. At Lydia Emerson's suggestion, they name her Ellen Tucker Emerson after Emerson's first wife.

Mar 20, 1841

Essays Published

Emerson's first essay anthology is published. It contains works like *Self-Reliance* and *The Over-Soul*, which will come to define his philosophies. Henry David Thoreau moves into Emerson's house, earning his keep by acting as a handyman and babysitter.

Nov 22, 1841

Daughter Born

The couple's third child, daughter Edith, is born.

Jan 27, 1842

Son Dies

The Emersons' eldest son Waldo dies suddenly of scarlet fever at the age of five.

Jul 1842

Edits *The Dial*

Emerson takes over editorship of the transcendentalist journal *The Dial*, replacing former editor Margaret Fuller. The magazine folds two years later.

Jul 10, 1844

Son Born

The couple's fourth and final child, son Edward Waldo Emerson, is born. Soon after Emerson publishes the book *Essays: Second Series*, and delivers his first anti-slavery lecture.

Jul 4, 1845

On Walden Pond

Emerson's friend Henry David Thoreau moves into a cabin on Emerson's property on Walden Pond and lives there for the next two years and two months. His experiences are the subject of his memoir *Walden*.

Dec 12, 1846

*Poems* Published

Emerson's collection *Poems* is published in the U.S. and in England.

1847

European Lecture Tour

Emerson sails to England for one of several European lecture tours.

1852

Decries Slavery

During his lecture tours, Emerson speaks out against the Fugitive Slave Law, which requires all runaway slaves to be returned to their owners and makes it a crime to assist escaped slaves.

May 6, 1862

Thoreau Dies

Emerson's friend and colleague Henry David Thoreau dies at the age of 44. Emerson gives the eulogy at his funeral. In his honor, Emerson publishes the memorial essay "Thoreau" in *The Atlantic*.

Jan 1863

Honors Proclamation

Emerson writes the "Boston Hymn" in praise of President Abraham Lincoln's signing of the Emancipation Proclamation.

1866

Honorary Degree

Harvard honors Emerson with an honorary doctorate. The following year, he is elected to Harvard's Board of Overseers.

1875

*Letters and Social Aims*

Emerson's book *Letters and Social Aims* is published. With his memory failing and his intellectual abilities slowing down, Emerson drops his habit of daily journal writing.

Feb 4, 1880

100th Lecture

Emerson delivers his hundredth lecture before the Concord Lyceum.

Apr 27, 1882

Ralph Waldo Emerson Dies

After catching a cold, Ralph Waldo Emerson dies at home in Concord, Massachusetts, a month before his 79th birthday. He is buried in Concord's Sleepy Hollow Cemetery.